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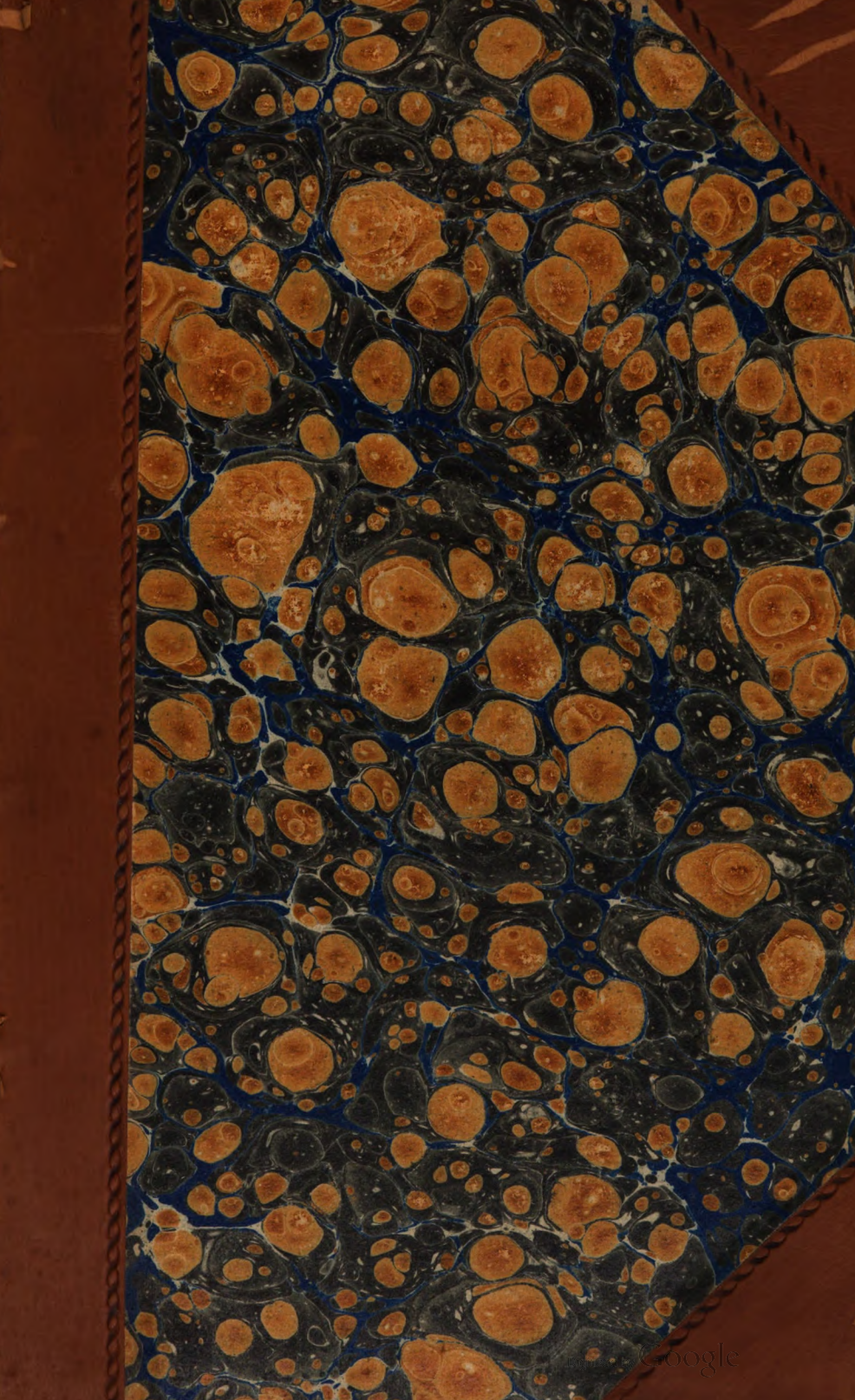
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A

J.H. 1830

COURSE OF SERMONS

PREACHED AT

GREAT ST. MARY'S CHURCH,

BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

DURING THE MONTH OF JANUARY, 1830.

BY THE

REV. R. W. EVANS, M.A.,

FELLOW AND TUTOR OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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SERMON I.

ON THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE.

[Preached on the day after that of conferring degrees.]

2 TIM. ii. 15.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

WHEN we contemplate human life, as it actually presents itself to the great mass of mankind in their daily experience and observation, a wilderness of circumstances continually starting up unlooked for before their feet, between which, at the moment, the mind can trace no imaginable connexion, a succession of thoughts and passions suddenly brought into play by unforeseen objects, and too often scarcely influencing one the other, intermingled without rational order, exciting without permanent effect, we can scarcely wonder

at the slight dominion which has ever been exercised upon practice by any system of morals, exhibiting, as they all must, a regular chain of consequences which is never witnessed in real life, leaving unaffected that great source of action—the heart, and addressing themselves to what is comparatively so little consulted—the understanding. Nay, some may be inclined to go even further, and think that they throw the events of life, with which we come daily into close contact, to too great a distance by making them subjects of theory, and may thus lead men to speculate when they should be practising, and to think when they should be feeling. A work which should have a deep and abiding influence on real life should reflect its image, presenting that real mixture of circumstances, thoughts, and feelings, which is found to exist there, and while not neglecting the proper appeals to the understanding, holding prominently forward a noble and influential motive for the heart. And, such a work there is—the book of Holy Scripture.

In this work, it would seem as if system had been purposely avoided. The Gospels are narratives of facts, told as they occurred, which as they arrest the attention, engage also the heart, as it

were incidently, in the great stream of doctrine with which they are pervaded. The Epistles again, that great doctrinal storehouse, are occasional letters, full of continual reference to facts, and so seldom indulging in any lengthened train of argument, that we are commonly left to gather the doctrine by putting together what is there detached, and by supplying what was evidently presupposed. In order fully to understand and appreciate this character of Scripture it is sufficient to appeal to the effect of any one of those regular systems of divinity which have been drawn up from it. How cold, how formal, how comparatively unpractical they appear. Yet the doctrine is precisely the same, it is the absence of facts, and the regularity of arrangement which causes this difference. In the one, we are presented with real beings, our Lord and his Apostles move before our eyes, the doctrines come forth, as called by circumstances, from their mouths, or as illustrated in their behaviour: they are associated with facts, and thus make their impression with the solidity of substance upon the heart. We are presented not only with teachers, but with hearers. We listen to the one, we sympathize with the other. If our Saviour speak, we stand

among the train of Apostles and disciples ; if St. Paul reprove the Corinthians, we are interested in their sorrow : if he encourage the Thessalonians, we participate in their joy ; if he advise Timothy, we join with him in fearful and trembling responsibility. Every little fact related or disclosed in allusion draws us into a nearer fellowship, giving additional substance of flesh to our conceptions, awakening our social feelings, and thus opening all the channels of the heart to the reception of the doctrine. At the same time, the mind thus moved feels a lively and pleasing interest in putting together in the understanding what is exhibited thus disjoined. Whereas, in the other case, our Lord becomes almost an abstract being, the goodly train of Apostles, disciples, and assembled churches vanishes at once, all facts are excluded, we have to follow with our understanding the artificial arrangement of the compiler, and the heart has comparatively little palpable presented to it. This peculiar character of Scripture will also require peculiar qualities in its reader, which it must be the object of all Christian education to implant in others, and of every Christian student to maintain, unimpaired, in himself. It is evident that a book, so miscellaneously arranged, must,

in order to be read to due advantage, be thoroughly read. Otherwise the mind will gather inadequate, and therefore false views, by omitting some important particulars in the combinations which it forms from the detached portions. It must be read with more than common sincerity, with more than common diligence, with more than common perseverance.

It must be read with more than common sincerity: because, since a perverse and disingenuous heart can frame for itself the most accommodating views, by an omission of particulars, out of any complex question, or large body of facts, so has it especial facilities afforded it for this in Scripture, which comprehends both those cases, where it is not tied down, and compelled to follow every step, examine every point, by the chain of a systematic arrangement. And so too especially has it the will, because the real views which Scripture presents are so humbling to human pride, so full of stern rebuke to the darling propensities of man, and unfold such awful views of present responsibility and future judgement, that our corrupt nature gladly lays hold of any means of turning aside from so uninviting a contemplation. In deducing its doctrines, therefore, such a heart

will decide as to what quantity and what quality of detail it will select or omit. For examples of the most determined self-accommodation, we need only point out those who remove the very cornerstone of the Christian faith, in denying our Lord's atonement, and to the manner in which they conduct their controversy. But alas! perhaps we need not go beyond ourselves for an example, and our own consciousness, joined with our experience, will suggest many of those shades which intervene between the first timid flutter of stricken conscience or wounded vanity, which would fain, but dare not, turn aside from some mortifying conclusion, and the proud defiance which shuts the volume at once, as speaking the language of a reproachful enemy.

We must learn therefore to approach this volume, as we would the ark of God, with a profound reverence, and a wholesome fear of violating its purity, with an offering of our whole heart; seeking in all humility the knowledge of his will, and not the confirmation of our own, laying that heart upon his altar to his searching light, in all its deep recesses, without the reserve of a single nook, or the subterfuge of a single turning. So will his Holy spirit descend upon us,

at once to purify our bosom, and enlighten our understanding.

The study of this book must likewise be engaged in with more than common diligence. Its very nature forbids any correct information to be derived from such a perusal as is given to other books. Such a perusal may indeed supply what is termed an historical belief, but it cannot effect the deep and lively impressions upon the heart, the holy imbution of the feelings, the linking of the thoughts in one bond, and directing their mass to one object, and the steadiness of view which shall be able to fix what to mortal vision is so flickering, and gaze on the light without a mote in the eye or cloud in the air.—No! it cannot supply a firmly rooted faith. That is the reward of far superior exertions, the effect of an union of heart and understanding in the same cause, which can be attained only by unwearied diligence, in putting together again and again, and weighing in all its bearings, the detail of holy writ.

It must be pursued also with more than common perseverance. In the perusal of other books, we often arrive at their conclusion with our reasoning advanced, and our imagination excited beyond the point at which the author has paused.

And, in every case, so circumscribed is the mind of man, a limited number of perusals is sufficient to give us full possession of all which the writer himself really understood. But Scripture presents us with a portion of the mind of God, and who hath known that, or been his counsellor? it can therefore never be laid down. Were human life protracted to a period ever so long, the more he studied, the more would the student find demanded still his study. The heart needs a continual renewal of healthy affections by feeding upon the sense of God's will, the understanding to be brought from continual deviation into adjustment to the standard of divine truth, and as page is turned over day after day, detached passages shoot, like distant centres, interlacing needles of connection, points, at which the mental eye before stopped as the limits of vision, become crowded with life and circumstance, in every direction views are expanding, difficulties clearing up, deeper and more lasting impressions are forming. Who for instance will say, that his understanding ever arrived at an unbroken view, even within its reasonable limits, in the epistle to the Romans? Who, that his heart ever reached its depth, in such a passage as St. Paul's farewell address to the

church of Ephesus, how much less in those in which he accompanies the Saviour of the world to the cross? Who, that he ever satisfied either heart or understanding in the crowded magnificence and awakening conclusions of the Epistle to the Hebrews? The book which tells of future life may indeed well demand for its comprehension all the employment of this, and the word of God for ever exercise the highest faculties of man. Such is the character with which the student must approach the holy volume: such it must be his care to form by all preparatory means in his power. The foundation of it is evidently a habit of patient examination of detail, of a careful study of facts, which must be the more numerous in proportion to the extent and weight of the superstructure. There is indeed an opinion, unfortunately too prevalent, that such a habit is incompatible with higher talents. Such an opinion can only be the offspring of vain indolence. For it is the very nature of genius to enter into the dust and tumult of the arena, and grapple hand to hand with detail: amid a multitude of facts to form his own combinations, create new shapes, cut out his own views, and to disdain to rest content with what are called general views, those

ordinary tracks through the field of knowledge, which have been trodden bare by twice ten thousand minds before.

To the formation of such a character, there are many obstacles opposed, and by far the most serious are those which spring up in the very field of knowledge itself. The deceitfulness of the ground is proverbial, and the more we are acquainted with it, the more we perceive the necessity of keeping a guard upon every step. Yet is it daily entered without the least foresight or precaution, as if there were a single spot in the regions of body or of mind, which the great adversary had not beset with his stumbling-blocks.

Too many persons, when they have arrived at the end of that preliminary course of knowledge which has been imposed upon their earlier years by the wisdom and authority of their predecessors, and have come to the use of their own discretion, are apt to think all concluded, when in fact all is but seriously begun. Misled by this notion, they either desist from further exertion, or make but a most inadequate use of the means which God has so bountifully put into their hands.

One, for example, who has long from his comparatively confined spot cast a wistful eye at

the wide field of general literature, spread out before him in such imposing extent and pleasing variety, takes immediate advantage of his liberty, to enter upon it with no other object in view than his own gratification. But it is the object in every pursuit which gives it its character, and rewards it with a blessing or a curse. And the only legitimate object of all knowledge is to turn it to God's service according to that peculiar station in which we have been called. Under a baneful influence therefore he is attracted from spot to spot without staying to receive a lasting impression from any one. He flies from pursuit to pursuit, as the drone from flower to flower without gathering honey. He grasps at all things and proves nothing. In course of time, his mind, habituated everywhere, from want of patient investigation, to gratuitous assumption, grows insensible to the force of proof, its independence of thought, by borrowing continually the views of others, through the neglect of the proper means to form its own, is broken, its stability destroyed, and its straight-forward native ingenuity is gone. He mistakes for talent the slavish docility which it has acquired: loose and desultory habits come in the place of single-minded persevering industry,

and an over-weening childish vanity fills up the measure of the curse of barrenness, with which God ever visits the abuse of his gifts, and puts the finishing crown to a character which, when suffered to be completely formed, never was and never will be found among the earnest readers of God's holy word, whose value he has made himself incapable of appreciating, unable to summon sufficient attention to master its detail, or vigour of mental faculties to digest. *

Another character also ill qualified to approach the holy volume with the due earnestness and proper information, is he who has never extended his serious pursuit of knowledge beyond the boundaries of the exact sciences. His great error lies in always judging of the nature of moral truth, (including in that word religious,) from that of abstract truth. Because the one can be taken up and entertained at any moment, so he thinks may the other: As the understanding alone is engaged in the one, he forgets that the heart is principal in the other: as the understanding is the sight to the mind, informing it at a single glance,

* Few perhaps can have failed to remark that the great majority of our free-thinkers, are not only second-hand thinkers, but even second-hand readers.

he considers not that the heart is the touch also, informing it by the slow and successive application of parts: that the former when it has once perceived a truth, retains it fresh, and involving all that it did when first discerned, and ever ready for immediate application, while upon the latter it comes by the gradual process of page on page, line on line, and letter on letter, is every moment losing some portion of its original freshness and extent, and requires, in order to be lasting, a continual reimpression.

Hence he is too much inclined to undervalue the difficulties attending the reception of religious truth, and to be blind to the necessity of a constant recurrence to the written word of God. He is apt to consider the general notions which he has formed upon its doctrines, often through a most imperfect channel, as giving him possession of the results of the detail of the Holy volume, and to think that into that detail, as into a set of subordinate truths they are resolvable at his pleasure. Thus not only have his habits of thinking disinclined him from the proper and minute study of scripture, but he is not so much as aware of its necessity.

A third character is he, who having hung over

the treasures of literature, and neglected, as the miser his food, the healthy supplies to the mind from the world without, has contracted the disease of an irregulated imagination. Nothing is more arbitrary in its choice than this, nothing more exclusive when it has chosen. If it will fix upon the brilliant and the vast, it will also as often lavish all its wealth in capricious profusion upon the veriest trifle, for then it experiences the consciousness of its own powers displayed in the magnitude to which the gorgeous dress laid on, has swollen an object so insignificant. It will choose the vast for the room which it gives to its extravagance, the trifling for the indulgence of the pride of creation. All between, including the golden mean of calm and sober dignity, is overlooked and despised. He comes, therefore, ill-prepared to the simple language, quiet tenor, and unaffected good sense of the Holy text. He will, instead of sitting down to a patient study, and accompanying it with heart and understanding in all humility, turn over the pages to find the favourite food of his mind, neglecting here, and fastening there, distorting thus its genuine features, and changing the form which was given it by God into a monster, the work of human hands.

It was even thus, that the earlier heretic corrupted the Gospel, and revelled in the contemplation of a brilliant train of beings, the offspring of his own creation.

These cases, to which more might have been added, have been stated as briefly and generally as possible, and, as all general cases must be, pushed to their extremes. It is not necessary here to qualify them, and give them more practical substance. Few, if any, of those who have tasted the enjoyments of a liberal education, and have paid proper attention to the internal operations of their own minds, can fail to have detected in his own bosom, at some period or other, the elements of each. They must have experienced the strong temptation of a wide field of knowledge, they must have felt the power of philosophical generalization, they must have indulged, like the child who presses his closed eyes, the brilliant and gorgeous colours of imagination. Happy they, if they shall have been enabled to keep down each element in due and harmless subordination. These cases are sufficient for the point in hand, which was, to show the more prominent obstacles which the pursuit itself of knowledge throws in the way of the study of

Scripture, rendering more rare, than perhaps is generally thought, the character which was laid down for its earnest, and improving student.

It would be strange indeed if the cultivated mind were not exposed to increased difficulties, and obnoxious to greater perils. The extension of any sphere of good is necessarily that also of the evil which is so intimately mixed up with it, and the Giver of all good things, as he bestows not his gifts in vain, would depart from his usual economy, if he did not accompany them with corresponding trials to call forth their due exercise. Therefore, a cultivated mind dwells in the midst of perils, and, like the intruder into power, cannot remain with impunity where it is. It can neither tarry nor sleep; if it grow not stronger, it is growing weaker; it must go on, it must go on to greater and still greater power, until it attain that sovereign power which is conferred by the knowledge of the word of God. There alone is its resting-place, there only its throne, whence it can survey its enemies subdued and crouching at its feet.

The knowledge of that word is indeed a sovereign power to which all other knowledge must administer but as a loyal subject. For all other,

however brilliant in appearance, however vast in extent, however useful in means, yet, if independent of this, terminates but in the mortal body. This is the fountain of honour to them all. The exact sciences are truly valuable only inasmuch as by furnishing the conveniences of life, they supply men with leisure for mental improvement, and therefore for the maintenance of a purer religion, as by disciplining the reasoning powers they purge the mind from the superstitions of a gross imagination, and as by unfolding the mighty workings of God in the natural world, they dispose him to turn with augmented interest and admiration to his glorious economy of the spiritual. The liberal arts are truly valuable only in as far as they humanize society and prepare and maintain the road of the Gospel, and furnish that vast body of preparatory and collateral information, which is absolutely necessary to the clear understanding of its holy word. Yet such is the perversity of human nature, that as God is forgotten in his saints by the weak and superstitious, so is this forgotten in its servants by the wise of this world. This is the teacher of the soul, not of mortal flesh: this enables us to do

what the heathen endeavoured, and reckoned the great object of his philosophy,—what the poet, too fondly, alas ! sang as its most glorious effect, to surmount the terrors which encompass this mortal life, and trample under foot the insatiable grave. Yet this which supplies to overflow all that the heathen so earnestly sought, can be neglected by Christians ; yet it can be allowed to have a slighter influence than even his ineffective philosophy (which turned aside from the contemplation of immortality) so that their most serious studies shall scarcely receive a tinge from it. Let us cast another look, and blush the while, at the poor heathen whom we are so accustomed to pity for his scanty light and lamentable errors. So impregnated is his literature with his religion, so thoroughly is his language in every page imbued with it, that we cannot approach the oracles of Christian faith in the original tongue without a good acquaintance with his rites, his modes and objects of worship. As if God in the counsels of his providence had purposed to put us to shame, and to discover to us at the same moment, with the glorious light and comfort of his Gospel, the abyss of darkness and error from

which he has delivered us.* It would (it is to be feared) be a mortifying result, were we to enter into a comparison for ascertaining the question, which of the two, from a perusal of the same number of similar works in each the others language, would have the advantage. Would the Greek derive as clear a notion of the Gospel from ours, as we do of Paganism from his?

Still, however, it shall gladly be allowed that the too great infrequency of the study of Scripture does not arise so much from a wilful neglect as from inadvertency. It is a book in every one's hands, a book which every one is supposed to know, and which consequently every one supposes that he does know. But a great portion of this knowledge, with the possession of which he flatters himself, instead of being derived directly from the fountain-head by a diligent perusal of the word, is often but that traditionary religious information which floats about in society, and

* What a crowd of thought lies in the reflection, that the pages of Aristophanes should administer to the full understanding of Scripture!—Against the remark which follows, it may be objected, that the dignity and awfulness of Christian truth will not admit of the unceremonious introduction to which the heathen superstition was subject. Making however this allowance, enough will remain for the argument.

which, with every advantage of a continual renewal and opportunity of correction from attending on the public offices of the Church, cannot but be exceedingly deficient, and comes to him, moreover, in the same channel with the law of the land, the conventional usages of the world, and other accompaniments, which degrade its awful character, strip it of all its heart-stirring power, and assign it a place scarcely above the established canons of society. This false presumption of knowledge is also furthered by the fact of men being so much the slaves of general terms. Unfortunately, in exact proportion to their ignorance of the particulars which they include, and to their consequently seeming comprehensiveness, is the idea which they entertain of the power of knowledge conferred in their use. And thus the most awful abstract terms of our religion appear to them to convey in the mere usage a much more extended knowledge than that of which they are really put in possession. Let us take off the familiar veil which has rendered some of these terms so tame and unappalling, and examine the real features which lurk beneath.

How familiarly will men use the term Redemption. But have they ever called up before

their mind, and placed next to their hearts, the facts which are included under it: man expelled from bliss,—a world lost in iniquity, devoted to death,—the Son of God appearing as a Redeemer from heaven, crucified for its sins, raised up again for its justification? They will speak of grace. But have they learned from their own hearts, gathered from experience, and drawn from the instruction of Holy writ, how much that was called in to repair? Have they followed its glorious course in the characters exhibited in Scripture from the first day of its visible descent upon the Apostles, tracing its healing influence on the weakness of human nature? Have they examined its promises, its objects, its means, and sought by prayer its effects upon themselves? They will speak of the atonement. But have they ever in their hearts confronted two beings face to face,—sinful, weak, mortal man, with Holy, Almighty, everlasting God,—and tried to reach the height of the mercy, and sound the depth of the love, which could draw cords of reconciliation between two such beings? They will use the term future retribution. But have they ever calmly looked in the face the tremendous aggregate of facts to which that term gives unity, Christ coming with his host

of holy angels, and the trump of God, to judge the quick and the dead, of all tongues and of all ages, separating the crowd as Moses once the sea, on his right hand and on his left, welcoming the one side to bliss, dismissing the other into everlasting fire? They will speak of our Lord's divinity. But have they ever followed him in that glorious character through the two covenants, blazing as the angel of the one with fearful signs and wonders, and going about humbly, as the minister of the other, doing good with miracles of mercy and love? Have they reflected how overwhelmingly awful this attribute renders what is already so awful; how it affects his rejection, his agony, his cross, and his grave; and how prominent in responsibility the Christian stands apart from the rest of mankind, since God is in a peculiar manner his Master; God in a peculiar manner his judge? These are terms, the sense of which must not, cannot come and go at mens' bidding, nor, because familiar as household words, must they deem that therefore they have a sufficient acquaintance with them. Half of the errors, both in religion and in morals, arise from inattention to the defined sense of general terms. They must continually keep them filled up to their full mea-

sure of meaning by frequent appeals to Scripture, and give them thus their due weight upon the heart. Otherwise with advancing years they will make a slighter and slighter impression, until they lose all power of affecting, and sink into the most vague and unmeaning portion of the vocabulary.

There are many here present who have still their course before them. They are at that period of life when the experience is so common of those blissful moments, in which, from health of body, and lightness of heart, the bare animal existence is felt as an inestimable blessing. Oh! let me ask, then, what feelings do they think must attend the consciousness of existence of a mind, fresh in spiritual health, and full of the joyful assurance of immortality? Such is the effect of the word of God, thus it confers the blissful feelings of eternal youth upon the mind. Let both the recurrence and the remembrance of such moments bring the analogy to view, and accustom them to appreciate the exceeding value of this heavenly gift. Let them grow, indeed, in knowledge, but at the same time remember, that this is the one thing without which all knowledge at the best is useless, and may be most pernicious.

In hands thus instructed, knowledge is indeed a glorious, a powerful instrument, but, like all human acquisitions, is in itself but a brute weapon, depending for its good or evil on the mind of the employer, and may be used in felling God's cedars on Libanus, when it should be hewing down the groves of Baal.

Let them, therefore, study to shew themselves approved unto God, workmen that need not be ashamed. Let them remember their Creator in the days of their youth, devoting to his holy word the freshness of the morning of their days. Theirs is indeed a critical time, and oh ! therefore, while the heart is yet plastic and unperverted, still in healthy communion with the head, while the mental vision is yet clear, while the power of observation is yet fresh and keen of edge, of attention yet undistracted, of memory yet retentive ; yea, let them remember in this their day, the talents which they are holding in trust. On the suitable employment of these gifts depends not only their native health, and masculine vigor of mind, but the power of appreciating divine truth is concerned, the welfare of their immortal souls is at stake. Once more, then, let me entreat them to consider together with the blessing, the respon-

sibility also of the gift which God has conferred upon them in a liberal education ; and, as they gaze on the wide and spirit-stirring prospect which he has thus unveiled to them, and feel that firmness of grasp and extent of power with which he has thus endued their understanding, let them resolve to render unto Him that gave, the first-fruits of their harvest. With the word of God let them begin, with the word of God let them end. And holding the right understanding of this ever in view, cheerfully let them enter upon the labour of detail, accustoming their minds to that patience which alone can produce a perfect work, or attain a precious object ; remembering also, that without the substantial support of a full body of well canvassed facts, reason will decline into barren speculation, imagination will degenerate into idle dreaming. Let them imitate the patience of that wise king of yore, who built the temple of the living God, and laying fact upon fact, as it were stone upon stone, like good spiritual masons, gradually raise and combine their views, till all grow in harmonious proportions of strength and beauty into a goodly temple, aptly fitted together. In such a temple only of the mind will Scriptural truth deign to

**dwel : and it will dwell, and fill the whole house
with the glory of the Lord.**

SERMON II.

ON THE PECULIARITIES OF CHRISTIAN MORALITY.

1. COR. ii. 2.

*For I determined not to know any thing among you,
save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

THESE forcible expressions are supposed to have been directed by St. Paul against the teachers of two systems, most fruitful sources each of early heresy, the questions of Greek philosophy, and of Jewish tradition, which were then vexing a church conspicuous among the primitive seats of the Gospel for its lamentable divisions. Not unacquainted with either system as we know St. Paul to have been, yet he deprecates most earnestly their being brought to bear in any degree upon the Gospel, to mix their turbid streams in the smallest portion with its purity, and reminds the

Corinthians how he himself had preached it among them, with all simplicity and strict adherence to its principles, with an utter abandonment of all foreign knowledge, as if the existence of those systems had been wholly unknown to him.

It had been well if this wholesome example had been more generally followed. But down even to our own day, man has been ever thinking that he can mend God's work, interpolating his own conceits among the fundamental principles of the Gospel, and Reason, deeming its province intruded upon by Revelation, has been struggling to remove the boundaries which have been set to her previously ill-defined dominion. This has been peculiarly the case in those questions which concern the duties of life. It was, indeed, to be expected. Their throng, their hourly occurrence, their worldly complexion are calculated to induce men to refer them to principles much more accommodated to their own notions, to sources much nearer at hand than the spirituality of the Gospel will allow. And thus, not only in practice, but in theory too, a mixture has been made of the light of nature, and of the illumination of the Gospel, which, while it obscures both, is more particu-

larly injurious to the latter in proportion to its superior purity and brightness.

In the last address from this place, I made a few opening remarks upon the arrangement of the holy volume, as singularly adapted to the purpose of teaching a rule of life which shall have a real and abiding influence on practice. That rule I shall now proceed to discuss more particularly, and to ascertain how the doctrine of Christ crucified bears upon those duties which moral philosophers would fain have us derive from principles which themselves have laid down.

It will be necessary to devote a few previous observations upon their different systems, so general, however, that they will be considered as forming only two classes, in one of which the light of nature alone is consulted, in the other the aid of that of Revelation is called in.

The first contains the several systems of ancient philosophy. Their deficiency in not supplying a motive of obligation sufficiently obvious, strong, and permanent, has been the subject of frequent remark. Nevertheless, they are of inestimable value to the Christian scholar, not only from disclosing to him the peculiar points upon which a revelation was required to bear, not only from

the interest which they excite by the heart-moving comparison of their original light of nature with our acquired illumination from the Gospel, but principally because they have almost exhausted the storehouse of human thought upon their subjects. Hither, therefore, the infidel will appeal, and here the Christian must be prepared to meet him, and make him feel the untenableness of his ground.

The second class is obviously destitute of all these advantages. It remains to see whether their loss has been counterbalanced by the acquisition of any others.

Perceiving the defect above mentioned of the ancient systems, the authors of these have thought to supply it by calling in from Revelation, the doctrine of a state of future retribution. To this plan, however, there are insurmountable objections, not only from reason, but also from the Revelation itself whence they have borrowed.

There is an objection in reason, first, because in a system of philosophy, all ought to be traceable to one source. And this character forms the great beauty of all the ancient systems. On such a principle, therefore, a future state to which the system attaches, the final motive of obligation

ought to be demonstrable, equally with the rule of life, from the light of nature. But every one knows that it is not. Thus the system is deranged and its logical unity dissolved by the introduction of an entirely foreign and independent principle.

A second objection on the ground of reason is, that our assent to the doctrine of a future retribution implies an adequate notion of the Divine justice. But this (as in the case of other of God's attributes) must be derived from our notions of human justice. Thus we are conducted by such a system in a vicious circle. We must have formed an adequate notion of human justice before we can assent to the position of a future retribution, and we must assent to the position of a future retribution before we can possess ourselves with an adequate notion of human justice. * But

* How singular is the oversight of Paley, in laying down, or rather adopting, his fundamental definition: "Virtue is the doing good to mankind in obedience to the will of God, &c!" Who would have supposed that he had never defined the term 'good,' one of the most thorny in morals, one whose application was a distinguishing feature of difference between the two most famous schools of antiquity? Besides (an unpardonable fault in a definition) it is already included in the term 'will of God,' as any one will see immediately, by merely substituting the words 'acting towards', for 'doing good to'.

the objections from the very Revelation itself, to which they profess themselves indebted, are of a still more serious cast.

In borrowing this doctrine from Revelation they have entirely neglected to take with them the foundation upon which it rests,—the cross of Christ. It has accordingly shared the fate of all facts which are introduced, detached from the natural relation of surrounding circumstances. It droops and dies as a tree which has been transplanted without its roots, and as far as the planters are concerned, the roots have been left to perish too. For what is now their position as they lay down their transplanted doctrine of a state of future happiness? However stated, it amounts to this, that a man may be saved by the law which they there establish. It is difficult to see how this materially differs from the opinion so severely reprobated by our Church (and in that reprobation every Christian Church and person will join) namely, that “every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law, and the light of nature.” This is, indeed, removing the offence of the cross, by removing the cross itself, for (as our article proceeds to

say) Holy Scripture doth set unto us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved.

Let it, however, be allowed (for argument's sake) that this consequence from their system has been too closely pressed; let it even be granted that advantage has been taken of unintentional omission, of neglect of fortifying points, of latitude of language. Still the effect cannot be disputed, which is to instil into minds not culpably unwary the above pernicious opinion, and to lead them to think the grand and essential facts of Christianity,—our Lord's incarnation, death, and burial,—an useless shew,—a cumbrous machinery, the employment of which seems derogatory to the wisdom of Almighty God. Is it considerate; is it charitable; is it dutiful to our crucified Master, to employ, or allow to be employed, a carelessness of expression pregnant with such dreadful consequences?

Putting, however, the best colour upon all this, still we find another objection behind, which cannot be set aside by any plea of mere looseness of language.

For, let us supply what they may assert to be an unintentional omission. Then, since of course

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a system of morality is applicable to all mankind, their position stands thus : That all men, by observing the duties which the system has laid down, will enjoy the future happiness which has been procured by the cross of Christ. But where is such a position to be found in Scripture? Where has it promised a state of future happiness to all mankind, upon living up to their duties? Its promises are confined exclusively within the pale of the Christian covenant, and the salvability of any without can be but the suggestion of a charitable hope, or (granting the very utmost) a fit subject of argument for such as are prepared to engage in an interminable controversy.

Thus, even upon putting the most favourable construction upon the systems of this class, we are obliged to conclude, that their foundation rests upon a position of which they affirm the certainty from Revelation, but which, in fact, is not to be found in any part of its records.

It may, however, still be asserted that such systems, though not applicable to all mankind, may serve to point out a rule of moral conduct to the Christian, supplying directions where the Scriptures are not practically explicit, presuppose natural principles, or perhaps are silent altogether.

The state of the question thus narrowed brings us back to the point which was proposed to be examined, and will render much assistance to the course of argument, by setting off in more prominent relief the peculiarities with which the doctrine of Christ crucified invests all those duties which are the subjects of moral philosophy.

Let it be borne in mind, that according to the latter systems just discussed, the motive which obliges the Christian is the simple one of a certain expectation of future reward or punishment. According to the gospel, it will appear to be one much more complex, or at least (even granting this to be the final) that it can never be acted upon by him except in association with a number of others of a certain class. Their rule of life also is sought among the principles of nature. In the Gospel it presupposes these, but is not confined to them; so that the Christian calculating from those principles only would as certainly fall into error, as he who omits important elements in any deduction of science. They suppose only two persons, man and God. The Gospel interposes a third, the Son of God, and this of course immediately gives a new complexion to the whole question.

God the Father has made the promise of everlasting happiness to man, upon obedience to his will, for and through the merits of his only begotten son Jesus Christ, who by taking our nature upon him, suffered death upon the cross in order to procure for man that inestimable blessing. But the Father, notwithstanding this reconciliation, has no immediate communication with man: he will turn away his ear from every note of praise or prayer, he will avert his face from every posture of supplication which is not addressed to Him through the mediation of the Son,—through him he bids him look for every blessing now and to come, to the new relation which he has established with mankind to confess himself indebted for all, on him to hang all his hopes, and having his heart impressed with the cross of Christ, his thoughts fixed in earnest contemplation of what his Saviour has said, done, and undergone, and thus imbued as it were with his precious blood, to proceed to action.

It is evident, therefore, that the will of God is not to be sought by the Christian merely among the natural relations of man to man. Those relations indeed still subsist, but they are all drawn by Christ towards himself, and acted upon by his

influence. Besides their mutual motions, they have also another and general course assigned them. If they follow not this course they are not within the system of Christianity. Every act of the Christian must have some reference to an act of Christ's, displayed by him in his sojourn upon earth, and destined to exert its influence upon him, as mystically affecting his spiritual station, as directly operating by example, as urgently promoting by command. Thus, is God's will that we should be gratefully disposed, to be sought in the mere shallow elements to which the moral philosopher would direct us? Or shall we not rather carry into our practice that deep and settled feeling to which human language cannot give a name, that which we imbibe through every pore of mind from the contemplation of the character and office of the Son of God.

It is evident also, from the above consideration, that, as to motive, the Christian cannot, dare not, look at everlasting happiness without combining in the same view the cross of Christ. As consistently may he expunge from his creed every article intervening between "God the Father Almighty, and the life everlasting." No! that life he looks forward to through a long and permanent

chain of objects, every link of which has been designed to move both his heart and understanding: "through his holy incarnation, through his holy nativity and circumcision, through his baptism, fasting and temptation, through his agony and bloody sweat, through his cross and passion, through his precious death and burial, through his glorious resurrection and ascension, and through the coming of the Holy Ghost." This is his perspective, down this long alley of glorious and heart-stirring facts,—he contemplates the life to come, and through this only, as a Christian that hopes for salvation, dare he look forward to everlasting happiness.

On a basis so widely different from that proposed by the moral philosopher, rest the duties of the Christian, even where the former has borrowed the grand doctrine of eternal life.

It may be satisfactory to illustrate this bearing of the doctrine of Christ crucified upon our practice, by a comparison of passages from the philosopher and from Scripture enforcing the same precept. We are, however, enabled to enter upon a parallel still more convincing, and striking.

It is evident at first sight, that the book of the

New Testament must contain in its pages two rules of life; one, namely, which must have guided men before the Gospel dispensation was completed by the descent of the Holy Ghost, and another by which they were influenced afterwards, as members of that Covenant. Accordingly, the former will be found to prevail in the Gospels, the latter in the Epistles. This distinction, obvious as it is, has not been sufficiently attended to, and its neglect has led to much laxity of opinion. For many persons (and more especially the moral philosophers, to whose views on their subject it was suitable) have naturally, though very inconsiderately, fixed upon that great concentrated body of moral instruction contained in our Lord's sermon on the mount, and conceiving this passage, as coming from our Lord's own lips, to contain (if any can) the Christian doctrine, have been led to regard it in a view too much approaching to that of a system of ethics. So striking is the difference, that some Infidels (not caring to ascertain the real cause) have not scrupled to assert that Christianity as it came from its author was a mere moral system, and that this was corrupted immediately after his death by his apostles, more particularly by St. Paul.

The comparison of a very few parallel passages will be sufficient for the purpose.

In his sermon on the mount (Luke vi. 37.) our Saviour says, "forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." Here is a moral precept, whose obligation (in addition to that imposed by the law of nature) arises from the authority of the Deliverer, and the promise from God with which he accompanies it. But when we meet with the same precept in the Epistles, we find it grounded immediately upon Christ crucified. Thus, in his Epistle to the Colossians, (iii. 12) St. Paul urges them "to put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."—Where we see both the rule and the motive which are peculiar to the Gospel. Again, in the same sermon, (Matth. v. 42.) our Lord thus lays down the duty of charity. "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." Here is a moral precept enforced by the same authority as that above quoted. Let us now turn to the Epistles. In his second Epistle to the Corinthians (viii. 9.) St. Paul is pressing them to con-

tribute to the necessities of the saints, and thus lays down the grounds of their duty: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Again we are presented with the doctrine of Christ crucified.

Let one more example suffice. Our Lord, enforcing the duty of humility upon his disciples, says, (Luke. xiv. 11.) "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." But how does his Apostle exhort to the same duty? He thus charges the Philippians, (ii. 5, &c.) "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and

that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Never before, assuredly, was such an appeal made to the heart of man,—it rouses it, as it were, with the thrilling strain of the trumpet. The humble man is raised from the dust to sit with angels. To what beggarly elements indeed do we return upon resuming the principles of the moralist,—we seem to have fallen at once from heaven to earth.

Thus we find in Scripture a moral system infinitely more pure and perfect than any production of human hands, coming from the lips of its Deliverer with infinitely more authority, addressed also to a people which believed in the life to come,—we find this in the same book actually superseded by one which rests upon the fact and doctrine of Christ crucified. What shall we think, then, not only of the pretension, not only of the inutility, but of the mischievous antichristian tendency of those systems which we have been discussing.

We have now traced the peculiar bearing of this grand fundamental doctrine upon our moral duties, both as presenting a rule of life, and as supplying a motive of obligation. There is, how-

ever, another point in which it is quite singular: it at the same time furnishes an example.

In the case of every thing which admits of degrees our imagination can always pourtray something of higher excellence still, till at length we obtain in the mind's eye an ideal model of perfection. It is the constant contemplation of this model which leads us on from one stage of improvement to another, and ever with our advance, advances also; always at our head, beyond our grasp, and unattainable. In this lies the source of all excellence, the poet and the painter, for instance, work after a model thus conceived in their own bosoms, but never to be realized by their lips or their hand, and therefore often regard their own production with a sigh, while it excites the admiration of surrounding crowds. In the same way we can form in our minds a model of moral excellence unattainable by imperfect human nature, and some writers have feigned fictitious characters to embody their notions, and supply to coarser and less tutored minds that spur to virtuous emulation which they themselves find within their own bosoms. But after all, the real effect produced is slight. Men turn away from the impalpable unpractical model, listless, wearied,

and incredulous. Now the system which rests upon Christ crucified is not only a system of precept and doctrine, but also an aggregate of facts, and we are presented in our Lord, as man, with a real substantial being, the model of all excellence, one which surpasses every thing which our own bosoms could have framed in their highest aspirations. Great, indeed, is the advantage of an example. We are in morals, after all, but little children, we are too careless to enter into long detail, too ignorant to sum it up, and gather all its bearings. We require, therefore, a sensible picture to present at one glance what must otherwise be conveyed in long and minute description. And thus we can inform ourselves at once upon the very brink of action, into which we are so continually hurried, with but a few moments to spend upon preparatory reflection.

But, besides this great example of our Lord moving like a sun through the region of Scripture, we are presented in the train of his followers with innumerable lesser lights, borrowing from him, and reflecting to us. All these are attainable, as examples, and are at the same time proofs of the fulfilment of God's gracious promises in the restoration of our fallen nature. For in them we see

the marvellous effects of the grace which has been shed through Jesus Christ: in them we see the weakness of our flesh converted into strength of spirit: we see different and peculiar qualities in each exalted by the operation of that Spirit to a pitch of which we could scarcely conceive human nature capable, and combining them together are enabled to judge how the perfect man may hereafter grow out of our sinful nature. In them too, we see a holy band of martyrs and confessors exemplifying the conquering might of Christ crucified. "They had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They werestoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy) they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."—

These are our ancestors in the church of Christ. To their pictures we may look up, with their glorious deeds nourish our courage, and prove ourselves worthy descendants of the spiritual conquerors of the world.

One point remains, upon which it is necessary

to bestow a brief notice, since it supplies the ground upon which the authors of the modern moral philosophy have advanced the utility of their systems, and contended that Scripture does not dispense with them.

It has often been remarked, and by some objected, that Scripture, considered as a rule of life, omits some important duties; as, for example, friendship and love of country. The objection is much more apparent than real, and goes in effect no further than to say that these abstract terms do not occur there. We may with nearly as good reason blame the highly national Greek, or the staunch Roman, because they have no single abstract term perfectly expressing our word—patriotism. Scripture, as teaching not on professed system, but indirectly, by means of facts, and expressions called forth by facts, is, on that account, no great dealer in abstract terms. But let the above terms be resolved into their elements (and our practice must always so resolve them) and every part is immediately met by an application of Scripture. Thus, with regard to what is implied in the duty of friendship, is there no command to be kindly affectioned to one another, in honour preferring one another,—none to

bear with one another,—none to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and to weep with them that weep,—has our Saviour left no such act on record among those which mark his earthly sojourn,—does his intercourse with the family of Lazarus supply no example, and are there few elements of this duty to be derived by him who is engaged in the daily contemplation of the Son of God offering himself upon the cross for his redemption? The fact is, that Scripture inculcates a far deeper, and much more holy and permanent feeling than such as is implied in friendship, which is included as the less in the greater, and it sums all up in a single term unknown in moral systems—brotherly-love (φιλadelphia). It has been said also, and truly said, that Scripture sometimes attaches blessings or curses to duties or offences which it has never defined: that Covenant-breakers, for instance, are denounced, but the nature of a Covenant not explained. This is the very strongest example that could have been chosen. A word of more awful import does not occur in Scripture, it states the most affecting relation in which man stands to God, it raises up immediately before his mind a series of the grandest and most moving events which have occurred upon earth.

Scripture, in fact, presupposes a state of society in which such duties are necessary, and such terms current. But since their common acceptation in society may seem too undefined for all cases of application, to what source shall we refer for their strict definition? We must evidently have recourse to the light of nature which Scripture presupposes, and not by betaking ourselves to a mixture of the light of nature with that of the Gospel, commit Scripture in the absurdity of presupposing its own revelation.

Practically speaking, there will be little necessity even for this. In practice, men are seldom curious to investigate the bounds of duty, except with a lurking notion of transgressing them; when they anxiously discuss the limits of obedience, they are on the borders of rebellion; when of patriotism, on the brink of treason; when of friendship, on the verge of treachery.

Thus it has been endeavoured to shew the nature of the doctrine of Christ crucified, as bearing upon those duties which the moralists assume as their province. In the course of this investigation there has surely appeared no inclination to undervalue and decry the usefulness of moral philosophy. So far from it, that an

acquaintance with the study, as based upon the mere light of nature, has been expressly stated, at the outset, to be essential to the character of the Christian scholar of the well-appointed defender of his faith. But to those systems, which, by borrowing a truth, and not the whole truth, from Revelation, obscure the light of nature at the same time that they stain the purity of the Gospel, to them it is freely confessed that an equal deference has not been paid. Nor can he who addresses you sufficiently express, even in the most earnest terms of deprecation, his full sense and dread of their baneful effects. Alas! what they are too well calculated to produce, requires no additional encouragement. By the corrupt infirmities of our nature, we are already but too well disposed to dwell slightly upon the great doctrine of Christ crucified, to have recourse to any other base than this for a rule of life, and, like the wilful leper, to prefer Abanah and Pharpar to all the waters of Israel. From long habit also, and careless enjoyment, we are disposed to mistake an indulgence for a right; and thus to deem of revealed doctrines, such as the life everlasting, as primary inherent principles in our nature. Add

to this general tendency,—vices which impel many men on such a forgetfulness of our Saviour's cross, weaknesses which incline almost all. Our indolence is gratified by thinking to rest upon this one single fact of a future state, without being compelled to go through the long and awakening detail by which Scripture conducts us: our vanity looks complacently at the dignity of future glory, but turns away from the humiliating rebuke of the atonement: our love of enjoyment gazes with delight on the prospect of the happiness to come, but shrinks from the energy, the self-denial, and mortification, held forth from the cross of Christ. Thus all our corrupt nature tends with the whole of its bias this way. And shall education be called in to confirm it?

O, let us not err ourselves, nor lead others into error. To the Christian, the life to come is no abstract idea, which can be bandied about in heartless, selfish calculation; it is a crowd of ideas awful and vast, bidding defiance to the management of the puny mind of man. It is no single detached fact which *will* happen, against which we are to provide: it is one of a series, the far greater part of which *has* happened, and is affect-

ing us at this moment. It is no simple element which may amuse the head: it combines a throng of emotions to stir the heart. Its contemplation cannot be taken up by any one at his pleasure: habitual earnestness alone has this privilege; and when taken up, it requires effort to maintain as we should. For it requires to be maintained by studious reading of God's word,—by frequent meditation on the interventions of God with man there detailed; and by continual prayer,—that searcher of the Spirit, and opener of the heart.

Nothing is so dangerous as to render this doctrine familiar to the mind, divested of its Gospel accompaniments; and the Christian who has once brought himself to hold it steadily in view, without including Christ crucified, has, in that moment, virtually denied the Lord who bought him,—reckoned his blood common blood,—crucified Christ afresh.

Let the cold calculator be told, that it is Christ crucified which alone enables him or gives him any right to look onward to the reward of another life: it is this alone (and not human precept) which can sustain his feet in this world, amid the shock of daily conflict. And to this alone (and to

no help of human reason) when wounded by the great adversary, can he look up, as to its brazen type of old, and be healed. Here alone lie all his means of grace: here alone are seated all his hopes of glory.

A celebrated father * of the church, in remarking on the accomplishment of these words of the Prophet, "and his rest shall be glorious," says, in his fanciful manner, "the very form of his death is more glorious than a diadem.—Therefore, kings putting off the diadem, take up the cross,—the symbol of his death: on the purple, the cross; on diadems, the cross; in prayers, the cross; on arms, the cross; on the holy table, the cross; and in every quarter of the world the cross shines more glorious than the sun." What in his days was fast quitting the heart, and taking its place among the baubles of outside shew, degenerating into the sign of a wretched superstition, let us, in accordance with purer times, resume spiritually in our bosoms: when we rise, the cross: when we lie down, the cross: in our thoughts, the cross: in our studies, the cross: in our conversation, the cross: every where, and at every time, the cross,

* Chrysostom: Vol. i. p. 569. Ed. Benedict.

shining more glorious than the sun. Yea! let this, in our warfare below, become our sign, and in this we shall conquer.

SERMON III.

ON THE ANALOGY OF THE NATURAL AND
SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

1 PETER i. 23.

*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of
incorruptible, by the word of God, which
liveth and abideth for ever.*

To be born again of God and of the Spirit,—to be begotten by the word and through the Gospel,—to put off the old man and put on the new,—to become as little children,—to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord,—to come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,—these are phrases which are continually meeting our eyes in the pages of Holy Scripture, and it were well if their pregnant meaning as often found its way to our hearts. They are indeed figurative, but it is only by means of illustration,

drawn from the world of flesh, that our imperfect nature can obtain a glimpse of the objects and operations of the world of spirit, and they convey to us, as clearly as our duties and condition here can require, the important fact, that we have to undergo a moral death,—the death unto sin; and a moral birth,—the birth unto righteousness; and, that there is a strong analogy between the birth and growth of the body, and that of the Spirit, so that we may learn from the one to ascertain with sufficient precision the progressive stages of the other.

As this analogy (which it is now purposed to pursue) is intelligible only so far as our consciousness carries us, it will be sufficient to commence it from that moment, when God, by some one among his many merciful interventions with sinful man, calls him from a state of worldly thoughtlessness to a serious consideration of his spiritual condition, and from a secure and almost unconscious enjoyment of mere initiatory spiritual privileges to their actual and full exercise. That moment is, perhaps, with some but too transitory, and the creature dies almost in the birth; others expire in the rudiments of childhood; some, alas, in the prime of manhood; some, after a long struggle

with infirmity, start into health, and illustrate the analogy to its full extent, to their own salvation, and the glory of their Master.

Let us take the natural world, and contemplate the young child. Observe his intense curiosity; his unwearied, minute, and detailed examination of the new world around him. He will not be satisfied with the distant evidence of sight, hereafter to be his principal guide, but he must touch, taste, handle, and thus is forming that correctness of vision whereby he may in future judge of what lies beyond his reach. Such is the new man upon his first introduction into the spiritual world. Besides what is peculiar to it, all that detail which before surrounded him, but scarcely could engage his attention, now invested with a new character, solicits his observation at every moment, from every quarter. All that train of consequences, which flow so abundantly from the sinfulness of man,—from the mercy, love, and justice of God,—from a crucified Redeemer, and the certainty of everlasting life,—all that is delivered line by line, and page by page, in God's holy word,—all the hourly duties of life, which are now become the palpable dress of spiritual meditation and feeling,—all the opportunities which his clear sight

now perceives, thrusting themselves upon his notice, coming from God, like his daily bread, to try and nourish his young faculties,—all these fill his sphere of thought and action to overflow, attract him by their novelty,—invite him by their grandeur to examine and compare, and spiritually handle. His ardent curiosity will let nothing pass before him, merely as an object of sight; he must take in hand and prove all things, and cleave to that which is good. Thus he acquires those just powers of spiritual vision by which he extends his sphere of knowledge, that he may be enabled to comprehend with all Saints what is the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and be filled with all the fulness of God.”

The child, moreover, even while apparently least engaged, is, nevertheless, by various unseen ways, acquiring the necessary experience in the world around him; his habits are forming; he is growing conscious of his faculties of body and mind, more sensible to the calls of his new existence. And so, too, the infant of the spiritual world, in his intervals of practical quietude, is still busy; his newly formed thoughts are arranging themselves; his mind is ascertaining its place

and relation in the new world; he is almost unconsciously analyzing and combining the precious materials which he has gathered, so that on his return to more active communication it is with augmented powers, and with more intense enjoyment. The child's communication with the sensible world presents him immediately with one set of instincts, and, mediately, through gradual experience, with another; and thus he proceeds from the use of his mother's breast, of his own limbs, organs, and appetites, to those multifarious habits,—those instantaneous, though acquired operations, bodily, intellectual, and moral, which unconsciously are exhibited by a settled system of body and mind. Exactly analogous is the process and result upon our introduction to the spiritual world. And, as in the former case, we were under the influence of that continued exertion of God's power, to which we owed our birth, and which we call nature; so, in this, we are under the continued grace of the Holy Spirit, by which we were born; and the world to which he has brought us, operating upon our minds, produces a class of appropriate spiritual instincts, partly directly from the very act of our intercourse, partly indirectly in the process of habitual reflection and

continual experience, the results remaining by us in the shape of first principles, though the process by which we arrived at them may have been long dismissed from memory. To the former class, for example, belongs the fear of God, and a sense of our own unworthiness,—the immediate and inevitable results of our first communication with the spiritual world. Among such as the course of time supplies, may be placed instantaneous resistance to temptation: for it is only by a series of mortifying experiments that we can learn to distinguish its most dangerous aspects,—espy its most formidable points of attack,—estimate the ruinous consequences of a momentary relaxation of our guard; and thus arrive at the desirable result of an instant and intuitive view of the peril, and of as instant repulsion.

As in the case of the child, these principles increase in strength and number as we proceed, daily embracing a wider range of our actions, and guarding us more and more effectually from those unforeseen accidents,—forestalling all calculation, to which our course is liable. Fresh acquirements being daily made, others obtained long ago, are daily settling down into the class of first principles. And thus, as in the sensible world, our

immediate healthy communication with the spiritual world being secured, the higher faculties released from the slavish duty of the mere preservation of this new existence are at liberty to extend their range of discovery through the realms of spirit; day after day refining our nature, and raising us from a precarious and bare subsistence, to a more exalted state of being.

The right use and diligent exercise of these faculties, acquired under our education by the Holy Spirit, is as necessary to our spiritual health as those of the body, under the continual influence of its peculiar Creator, are to its vigour and perfection. Mis-employment, or neglect, not only prevent progress, but also cause them to recede. Derangement ensues, and disease day after day closes up some organ of communication with the world of spirit, till at last an exclusion, a spiritual death, ensues. Meanwhile their proper use and improvement is attended with pleasurable feelings analogous to those which accompany a healthy growth of the body, and as the youth hails with delight the increasing supplies of stature and strength, which by God's bounty are flowing in so fast upon him, so the born of the Spirit enjoys the consciousness of continually increasing strength

of spiritual grace, the development of one faculty, the ripening of another, by which he is enabled to soar still higher above mere earthly existence and arrive at a closer communication with the Father of spirits.

No analogy however can be perfect. Sooner or later the parallel must fail. In the case now before us, we must remember, that while we are perfect denizens of the sensible world, we are at the same time but imperfectly admitted to the spiritual. In some points, therefore, this analogy of flesh and spirit can be but faintly traced,—in others will fail altogether. For instance, in the former so powerful are our instincts, that no perversion of our reasoning faculties (and this has been attempted) can resist or overcome them. But in the latter, owing to our imperfect tenure of it, their resistance may be surmounted by wily argument, and the consequence is more dreadful in the proportion of a spiritual to a corporeal death. Therefore, they must be guarded and obeyed with all diligence: they are as necessary to our spiritual welfare as the belief of first principles is to that of the mind, as the continuance of its various involuntary motions to that of the body. Let the Christian, therefore, beware how

he argues against an instinctive reluctance of spirit. Let him contentedly abide the charge of obstinacy, because he cannot assign his reasons for it, and demand in return of the man of argument, why he turns away from a precipice,—avoids a raging torrent,—shuns a devouring fire. We may be assured, that whenever reasoning is employed to stifle this internal protest, whether from ourselves or from others, it is supplied by the father of lies, is a net laid for our feet by the unwearied craft of the enemy of our salvation, who would willingly quench the life-giving Spirit within us, and reduce us once more to the mortal bondage of the flesh.

Again, our spiritual creation is not independent, like that of our body, of any previous existence. It presupposes all along the ruder elements of our moral nature, and before we can acquire new principles, peculiar to a communication with the spiritual world, such as maintain our intercourse with the sensible must have been moulded anew,—received a different bias,—taken another channel.

We have not only to learn, but to unlearn. And one of the most delightful feelings with which God rewards our spiritual improvement, is the dis-

covery at length of a task which can satisfy our noblest faculties, one in which alone we find them to act in perfect unison with concentrated effect, and this our complicated mental frame to shew forth all the harmony designed by the hand of its Creator. It is a feeling analogous to that of manhood, when it finds the proper direction and combined effect of those powers which had been lavished separately, and without object, on the trifles of childhood. For example, the Christian who had formerly found, as he thought, his powers of understanding so vigorous, so acute, so suitably employed in the questions of policy, literature, or science, discovers now that they were coarse, blunt, inadequate, and unsuitably employed, compared with those to which in the service of the Spirit they have now ripened, when his judgement has grown up to that intuitive and exquisite discernment of God's will,—that nice selection amid the daily mass of occasions placed before him of what shall contribute best to his own spiritual health, and most redound to the honour and glory of his Saviour, setting apart with unhesitating distinction, profitable from unprofitable,—holy from unholy,—lasting from fleeting,—what is of God from what is of man; when

his power of abstraction is spent no longer on unpractical dreams, but grasps real spiritual essences; when his foresight pushes far beyond the boundaries of life; and when his power of attention has become an absorption, by which he can shake off at will the distracting intrusion of the world.

Meanwhile, the power of imagination, that fruitful source of virtue and crime, of joy and sorrow, controlled now in its course by those improved powers, fastens upon what is pure, turns away from what is impure. It draws out before him, in visible series, God's mercies and dealings with mankind; it brings home to his heart all that is detailed in Holy Scripture of his suffering and triumphant Saviour; embodies his holy attributes; renders sensible his presence, and continually holds up to his mind that which it is his prime object to realize,—the model of the Christian character; depicting all his graces and acquirements; suggesting his pure and unworldly sentiments,—his towering thoughts,—his unceasing homage to God,—unwearied charity to man,—his meekness, patience, hope, fortitude,—and presenting his crown of everlasting glory, and the peace of the world to come.

Similar too is the improvement of his affections,

which being in the first instance generated and nurtured by healthy exercise upon their proper objects on earth, and thence lifted up to God their final object, in whom alone they find their cravings satisfied, and object permanent, return upon the objects of daily duty endued with a constancy superior to all caprice of chance or change, founded upon a new and unfailing basis. The Christian loves, for Christ loved him; forgives, for through Christ he was forgiven; is humble, for he is a fellow in sin; is charitable, for he is a brother in redemption; is patient, for he is an heir of salvation. Even the commonest gifts and qualities grow up into estimable Christian graces: passive good nature is exalted into active charity; sanguine temper into lively hope; flow of spirits into angelic cheerfulness; diffidence into humility; a quiet spirit into fortitude; contentment into devotion.

Thus, from his communion with the spiritual world, the Christian comes as from the presence of God, with his faculties refined and affections purified, carrying into the world of flesh around him, like Moses from the mountain, traces of the high communion in which he has been engaged. But his illumination is not of the face but of the

mind; not to be done away, but introductory to greater.

Such are a few of the coincidences which may be brought forward to illustrate the analogy of the growth of body and spirit, the Holy Ghost supplying a continual inspiration of life to its creature, just as the Creator supplies the breath of his nostrils to the man. It is difficult perhaps to pursue such an analogy far, without inadvertently falling into the error of describing spiritual operations as too much allied to corporeal, and much caution is required in drawing deductions from metaphorical illustrations where the line of correct doctrine can be kept only by incessant reference to other considerations, which haste, or the natural fondness of pushing an analogy, is too apt to overlook. None, however, will dispute the conclusion, that spiritual amendment must be a work of time. Its commencement indeed must, like our birth into the sensible world, be momentary, whether it be referred to our entrance by baptism into the church of the Christ and God, or to the first awakening impression of spiritual things upon the worldly-minded heart. But we may as well expect the perfect man to issue from his mother's womb, as conceive the Christian to

be completely formed in the instant of his first turning his heart from the world to God. Were we to proceed with the analogy, we should conclude, inasmuch as the nobler creature is longer in arriving at maturity, and as the creature thus born, admits neither of old age nor of death, that the spiritual man was longer in forming than the natural. Not, however, to insist upon this, it must be borne in mind that there is a long process to be undergone before a positive growth in spirit can be said to commence: previous affections must be weaned,—passions subdued,—faculties diverted from a wrong channel. And, moreover, let it be remembered, that the full measure of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is not poured upon the mind at once: it is distributed by successive portions, increasing in proportion to what is already maintained, and turned to its proper account there; for, as our Lord himself says, “he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.”

Great, therefore, on every consideration, is the danger of procrastination; and even to speak of the past in the solemn phrase of lost moments never to be recovered, is to express but half of

the melancholy truth. For every one of those moments, however swift of foot, or light of burden, has left its impression for good or for evil upon the mind, according to its state, clean or unclean, just as the same outward impressions which bring health to healthy organs, but aggravate the disease of the unhealthy. There is no middle point: if we go not forward, we go backward; if we be not standing, we are falling; if we be not in health, we are in decay. Do we delay on the idea of being able to commence the work of religious amendment, and start into newness of life at will? Every consideration is opposed to an idea confessedly so absurd, and yet so commonly acted upon. And it is, indeed, a strong proof of our delusion, that with the analogy of the body before our eyes, and that body too, often suffering for the sins of the mind, we should think to resume our moral health at pleasure: that while months and even years of painful and cautious regimen are often necessary to re-establish the one, a few hurried days are at all times sufficient for the restoration of the other. That wound and bruise, and putrefying sore, which for the best part of life have been cankering and eating into the mind, shall cease at once their horrid repast,

upon the bare expression of our wish for health, and sorrow for their origin.

The human mind, however inattentive we may be to its operations, is all along growing up towards a certain system. Feelings are becoming rooted; thoughts are interlacing with one another, according to some predominant principle, which at last assuming sovereign sway, excludes all such as will not bend to the general organization which it has established. If this principle, therefore, have nothing in common with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it will in the end effectually exclude all sense of its necessity, and almost of its existence; and if it be not actually the Gospel of Christ, it will admit but of partial views of that which we ought to comprehend as a whole. Languor and listlessness are the consequence, and repeated stumbling from ignorance and carelessness makes us disgusted with the road which has been pointed out. We are blaming in our hearts the severity of God, when we have to complain only of our own want of energy; and accusing the niggardness of light, which our earnest and sincere exertion is, according to his holy promise, assured of obtaining in satisfying fulness.

It is in perfect accordance with this narrowness

of view, to sit down in idle expectation of some peculiar summons to begin upon the work of newness of life, as if all had not been summoned by their acquaintance with that Gospel, in the very front of which it is written, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," as if all required that palpable interference which called the Apostle of the Gentiles to his vast and extraordinary charge. But have they indeed had no call? Has God never been challenging their attention amid the multifarious incidents which he has strewn in their daily course, and the many desires, or reluctances with which he has informed their spirit? Have they no remembrance of resolution formed from time to time,—none of hours of repentance,—none of hours of hope,—none of hours of that holy calm which instantly overspreads the bosom when it has formed some pious determination? All these were consequent upon some call of God, and are evidences that he has not been forgetful of them. But if they pass by such as these in expectation of something more rousing, more special, of what nature may we reasonably conclude that to be which they await so complacently? God's ordinary dealings with men lead us to presume that it will come in the shape of some

overwhelming visitation, which shall scatter their habitual frame of thought to the winds, dissevering all their usual links, and tearing them with their affections from earth, weeping and dropping blood like the fabled myrtle. So that all being once again disentangled, they may grow together anew according to a new principle, which is Christ in the mind and in the heart. Oh! let no one wait for such a call as this to his duty.

We have now but just advanced within the commencement of one of those revolutions of time by which we number the days of our sojourn upon earth, a period upon which the most careless are accustomed to bestow some reflections. For who can avoid throwing back a look upon days now parted for ever, and upon time which never can be recovered? Happy he, who in his present state of mind and practice can find substantial records of past moments. To him, though bodily, they are not spiritually past,—they have an indissoluble link with the future,—they are the palpable earnest of eternal life,—the first-fruits picked here and there of an abundant harvest. Far different, indeed, is he whose retrospect is but a dream of barren thoughts and idle pursuits, where all is in wild disorder without the one grand object, and

runs from the grasp of memory, as freely as the sands of the hour-glass which have measured those precious moments. To him may well be addressed the words of the Apostle, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." For he has been indeed sleeping, and the dreamer has been indulging amid darkness and night in fantastic and unbridled thoughts; he has been enjoying a world of his own, where he himself has been creator, and not God,—where all has gone according to his own capricious imagination, and the will of God has found no place. The sights and sounds of God's world have been excluded; and he has wasted the precious moments,—reckless of place,—insensible to the lapse of time,—holding converse with unsubstantial beings,—expending his affections upon fleeting shadows.

"Life is a dream," said the natural man. Let no christian account of it so, for it is to him a time allotted by God for beginning and completing a most momentous work,—a work which is sufficient to fill up every part of it, to whatever length it may be extended, which requires the ardour of youth,—the steadiness of manhood,—and the caution of old age. Let him

not, therefore, defer an employment, the very commencement of which becomes daily more unsuitable to his years, and be like the tree, which, when it should be bearing fruit, is but blossoming. For thus the very purpose of life will be eluded, and a work, whose difficulties demand the pride and bloom of the faculties, will be first imposed upon them in their decay, and what requires unabated vigour,—unwearied watchfulness,—unexhausted spirits, will be reserved for a bed of sickness or decline of years, seasons of languor, indifference, and irresolution. True it is, that highly-gifted men have before now spoken in fond and complacent anticipation of setting apart some work as the suitable employment, and fit solace of their old age. But how different was the nature of that work from that which we have in contemplation. That was a work pleasingly associated with the past, not anxiously connected with the prospect of the future; it was a natural confirmation of previous habits, not a violent alteration; it was an amusement, not a toil; a minister to the mind of pleasure, and not of pains.

To day, therefore, while it is called to day, the work should commence. Who knows what im-

pediments the morrow may bring? It may bring friends to delude, or enemies to confound,—it may introduce calamity to bewilder our senses,—sickness to paralyze our exertions,—or death to cut short at once our miserable vacillation.

Each day, as it successively becomes to day, is all that we can call our own : let us make it truly God's too, by dedicating it to his service, in sincere endeavours by newness of life here to realize the promise of everlasting life in the world to come, which he has given us in Christ Jesus our Saviour.

SERMON IV.

ON THE COMPARATIVE OPPORTUNITIES OF THE
EARLIER AND LATER CHURCH.

EPHES. v. 15, 16.

*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools,
but as wise, redeeming the time, because the
days are evil.*

THE literal sense of the phrase, 'redeeming the time,' in this passage, and in one parallel in the parallel Epistle to the Colossians, has been variously interpreted. It is quite sufficient for the present purpose to gather the general import of the text, which appears to be, that the Ephesians should direct their course of life with all wisdom and discernment, full of the knowledge of the will of God, so as to be enabled to distinguish the opportunities which he presents, and to turn

them to proper account, accompanied and confused as they are with the numerous impediments to godliness created by evil times.

That the days are evil, has been the warning cry of every period of the church until now, no less under Christian, than under heathen governments: for, to every period has been assigned some peculiar trial of the godliness of its members. It has sometimes been sounded forth in notes of encouragement to resist; sometimes in the voice of most earnest deprecation to forbear, according as it has at one time appeared in the shape of violent persecution, as it did to the Ephesians, and the rest of the primitive church; or, at another, assumed the less repulsive but not less dangerous form of imposing prosperity. This cry may be louder at different times, but yet as Christ has promised to his church to be with it to the end of the world, as he has promised to every two or three met together to be in the midst of them, as he has promised to each individual a sufficiency of grace, and that he shall not be tempted beyond what he can bear, but that a way to escape shall be made for him; it must be concluded, that any peculiar disadvantage under which this or that period may seem to labour, is balanced also by

some peculiar advantage, and that none has occasion for superior boast or complaint. However unequal the ways of man, the ways of God are equal.

It is now proposed to examine this point by taking two extreme periods, the earlier and later times of the Christian church. Such a comparison must, if any thing can, be decisive of the question, since two periods could not be selected more contrasted. They are as opposite as nearness and distance,—as danger and security,—as wonders and common-place.

The first thing which strikes the inquirer, on approaching this investigation, is the apparently unqualified superiority of the earlier period, shewn in its possession of miraculous powers; and at these a wistful eye is often cast by persons, who not having taken due pains to lay a sure ground of faith, are troubled with difficulties and fits of scepticism, and cry out for signs and wonders that they might believe; and again, by those also, who disheartened at their own want of energy, finding it so far below the point to which they are conscious it should attain, wish for the supernatural spur which operated upon the minds of the early Christians. A nearer inspection will

reduce this superiority to the level of our own times. For, with regard to the exhibition of miracles, so much coveted, it ought to be borne in mind, that they acted no further in the first instance, than as challenges of the attention of the witness to the doctrine promulgated by the worker. That doctrine was still to be investigated, for the miracle may proceed from a good or evil source, (Matth. xii. 24.) and therefore, it was that the Beræans, in the most fruitful period of these extraordinary interpositions of Divine power, when the wondrous works of the Apostles were sounding in their ears, and displaying before their eyes, tried the spirits whether they were of God, searching the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. The question, therefore, is reduced to this. First,—Is there now an equally importunate challenge? Secondly,—Are there equal means of investigation?

I. The first question is quickly resolved.

When a miracle was exhibited before the eyes of the ancient heathen, it by no means necessarily roused his attention to a proper pitch of curiosity. Prejudice was active,—subterfuges had been invented,—and he could stifle all ten-

dency to further investigation by ascribing it to magic, or the powers ordinarily claimed by the wonder-workers of the day. To behold and to proceed in inquiry demanded sincerity of heart; unconquerable love of truth; a fortitude to abide the consequences of conviction, which were by no means doubtful, or desirable. Hence even of the beholders, the number of converts was comparatively small, and were of that little band, (how little, alas, in every stage of society,) who dared to see with their own eyes, and act upon the dictates of their own breasts.

But it was not to every convert that a miracle was exhibited. And where there was a single link of evidence interposed, the above indisposing causes would operate with ten-fold influence. The interval was equivalent to the whole series of evidence interposed between those days and ours. And if he did not follow up immediately the call upon his attention, all trace was lost: the Christian was met but here and there, came and went, and was quickly lost sight of amid the predominance of the Pagan world. On the contrary, the unbeliever of these days must divest himself of first-instilled principles, and absolutely make his escape from society, yea even from the face of in-

animate nature, studded as it is with monuments of Christianity, if he would avoid the incessant solicitation of the Gospel of Christ. Assuredly it would be ridiculous for the modern even to hint at any disadvantage here.

II. With regard to the means of research, the modern may murmur at the nearness of source to the ancient, at its distance from himself: may complain that he has to trace up a long course of evidence, extending through many ages; that while he dips his scoop in the stream, he has not in immediate sight the yawning rock and the cleaving arm to assure him of its miraculous source. How justifiable such a complaint may be, will appear from a very brief parallel of their respective means of evidence, and motives to enter faithfully upon it. To the one is presented the Church of Christ, young, insignificant, and scattered, but concentrated with surpassing power, upon every point however detached, by its possession of miraculous powers. To the other the church established from ages, universally diffused, strong in connexion with the bonds of society, but gifted only with the ordinary powers of the Spirit. To the one the records of faith, not always at hand

to peruse, not always perhaps collected into one body, but cotemporary with his own days, or not long prior. To the other every where at hand, gathered into one volume universally acknowledged, but of a date long prior to his own times. To the one an acquaintance with a despised people and a barbarous literature. To the other all that has been in association in his mind with good and admirable from his cradle. To the one a brief examination with little leisure and much peril. To the other a long review with ample leisure, and unbounded security. With regard to motive, the one had every reason to desist where the other has every reason to begin. Where the convert looked around for others to keep him in countenance, he saw them sprinkled here and there, the offscouring, scoff, and derision of the world,—the food of the axe, the stake, and the amphitheatre,—while he beholds all the civilized tribes of earth, the wise and the good, princes and their people, challenging him to their example, and crying out unto him, in freedom and not in bonds, to be even such as they.

In reply to the more reasonable demand of the other, who covets the moral effect of the miracles of the early church, in stirring up the energies to

holy action, we may first assert generally, that the ancient, not having been nursed up from his cradle in the faith, may reasonably expect a more powerful excitement; and that what was lost in time should be made up in intensity. We should also take into the account, the overwhelming trials to which he was exposed. If, however, it be answered, as it may, that such trials have occurred in later periods without any corresponding supernatural help, then (to omit the remark that the extraordinary gifts at that period bestowed, were not so much designed for the assistance of individuals, as necessary to the very existence of the church, and have accordingly been withdrawn, since it has ceased to be a scattered and helpless body) we may confidently assert, that the desired moral effect still resides with the church in its documents—the Holy Scriptures, to which, if a person diligently apply, and open his heart, he cannot but imbibe the effect, which is not the less abiding for not being communicated by immediate impulse. In fact, the distance at which he views the wondrous dealings of God in olden times, is compensated by their being presented, not detached, as they must have been to the spectator, but coming before his mind in one harmoni-

ous series, converging to one purpose ; not to the benefit of this or that individual, or particular church, as they might have appeared when they took place, but to the support and glory of the church, to the comfort and encouragement of its members throughout all lands, and all ages, to the end of the world. O, yes! even to us at the present day, if we but give our hearts and minds their due exercise in their most glorious province, and draw nigh with them, and commune with Him, with whom a thousand years are as a day, and generations but a span long, the effect of those wonderous works comes down through ages undiminished. Even to us the dumb speaks,—the withered arm glows with life,—the leper drops his polluting scales,—the lame walk,—the blind see,—the dead arise.

To say nothing of individual experience. We have convincing proof of this, from public and well-known facts. For in what instance have the modern martyrs fallen beneath the ancient? Their bodily sufferings could scarcely be less,—their spiritual trial certainly more severe, as it was administered by false brethren, and not by avowed unbelievers. Mighty, indeed, is the power of the word of God, when read diligently

and earnestly; as the voice of our Saviour speaking to us, searching our thoughts, and rousing our affections. But it comes with incalculable force in the hour of trouble, which shuts out all help and comfort from without, and compels us to the only place of refuge,—the throne of God, established in our own bosoms by long and unwearied edification of his Gospel.

Thus far with regard to the most obvious appearance of unequal distribution of advantages to the members of the earlier and later church. A less prominent, but certainly not less important subject of comparison, is the nature of those daily and ordinary opportunities, which the Christian is to distinguish, and separate from their accompanying impediments, and turn to the account of godliness.

Christ in his holy church, has assigned to every one his proper station. All is ordained of him, even to the very door-keeper of his house, the lowest of his holy priesthood. And, as he has openly appointed some apostles,—some prophets,—some evangelists,—and some pastors and teachers, with their respective spheres of duty; so has he also not less really, though from the nature of the thing less visibly, determined the place and duties of all those for whose edifi-

cation they were appointed. And most grievously will the layman mistake, if he think that all his thoughts and actions are to be less directed towards the honour and glory of the great head and glorious body to which he belongs; than the lives of those who occupy as doctors in his church a more definite place. If his exertions be from his station less conspicuous, they must not be less substantial; from every one God requires the whole of his services, which he must duly render, keeping watch with his eye by day, and his ear by night.

From the moment that the Christian awakes each day, to that in which his Master kindly lays him down again, he is encountered by a perpetual throng of circumstances, in which he must distinguish good from evil, extracting from them the opportunity which God presents, and surmounting the impediments with which it may be clogged. He must not think to despise the slightness of the occasion: were it, in his Lord's own words, but to give a cup of cold water, it must not be passed by. For it comes immediately from his hands; it is afforded as a means of stirring up, and calling out into practice, the grace which is in him; of exercising his spiritual strength; of

trying his discernment; and is the forerunner of another which its omission will render more difficult, both of being distinguished and arrested. Unemployed, it is irrevocable; mis-employed, it is pernicious. Such opportunities are too apt to be estimated by the effects which they produce around us, which may often be trifling, and not upon us, which can never be unimportant, oftener than we think most momentous. Thus, at every step and turn, the Christian has some call upon him to separate good from evil; to choose the one, and eschew the other; diligently distinguishing the work of the Lord from the business of the world.

Applying these considerations to the case before us, it must be allowed that the state of prosperity and security, by which the present period of the church differs from the earlier, especially from that in which the Apostle addressed the Ephesians, makes the discernment of God's opportunities more difficult. We are not mingled with the heathen side by side, the contrast of whose darkness would bring them before us in a stronger light. They are of the colour of all around, lie hid in the multiplicity of similar shapes. It is Christian society all around us. At the same

time, however, we are delivered from the dangerous infection of the heathen's example; which, while it threw some things forward in a stronger light, offered too convenient a shade for others. Again, not to dwell upon the unwillingness of exertion produced by such a state, prosperity mingles evil with good in so subtle an union, throws such an equalizing gloss on the face of things, and renders also, by the compact condition of society which accompanies it, relations so complicated, that a steady and acute discernment is necessary to distinguish what is wholesome from what is unwholesome. Whereas, in times of affliction, when society is broken up, those relations are narrow and simple, the opportunity to be arrested is of greater dimensions, comes in a pronounced and distinct form, set out in all the contrast of light and shade. But then it comes accompanied with circumstances of terror and dismay sufficient to quell any heart which has not prepared itself to undergo the extreme of suffering. While, in the other case, the person raises around him but a ring or two of waves of trouble upon the calm surface of society, and all is still as before. Besides, this latter has had more leisure to form and give an edge to his discernment, he has been all

along used to the minute shades by which circumstances around him are distinguished, and the calm and security with which God hath blessed him will indeed have been abused if it shall not have been employed in maturing the faculties which he has given him with a view to their improvement. Steadiness of view, patience of observation, and a quick discernment of minute differences, are the qualities which his state is required to produce. But supposing the opportunity equally discerned by each party. It may now be contended that it is not with us presented in company with those distinct and energetic motives to action, which enforced its application in earlier times. It is true. In our days of peace, society moves but sluggishly in answer to any impression. The effect, therefore, does not so immediately follow; there are certain stages in the operation, and hence also we have often a series of motives to go through before we arrive at the final which determines. We are, moreover, naturally reluctant to disturb the calm surface around us by any unusual exertion. Whereas, in the other case, the effect would more immediately follow, and society was already in derangement. But we have most ample compensation in this,

that our declining such opportunities is not so immediately fatal. There is a train of them, and in the space allowed us between the neglect of the first, and a fall from the faith, we may retrieve ourselves by arresting another. But there was presented at once the dreadful final alternative, "Christ or no Christ," and the opportunity once passed, gave him over to a reprobate mind,—accused him of apostacy,—bade him curse God and die. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, (vi. 4.) "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." Any wilful sin was certain in those days of persecution to draw that of apostacy with it: the above passage, therefore, would excite no remark upon its uncompromising severity. Yet how alarming is its tone to the reader of the present day; conscious of wilful sin, how dreadful does he find his situation, and how disproportionate does he think the consequences to the

offence. But how relieved he feels at once from all his terrors when he has discovered that it is the sin of apostacy which is thus terribly denounced, and how careful modern commentators are to assure him of this! We have, in this fact, a strong proof of the happiness of our lot in these later days.

We might proceed to a long extent in comparing the circumstances of the two periods. But sufficient perhaps has been already stated, and it may be enough to observe in brief, that then physical courage was rather called into action—now moral. Then danger was rather the object of dread—now opinion. Then man was combated rather face to face—now he is entrapped by a net for the feet. The tempter then had more recourse to brute force—now he insinuates. On these, and similar points, we should still find advantage and disadvantage equally distributed to the two periods, and that God's ways are equal : it is ours that are unequal.

We are not, therefore, in the least behind our predecessors in the church of Christ on this consideration: we have equal means with the Ephesians of "redeeming the time, since the days are evil." And having ascertained the peculiar

character of our times, let us become sensible to the imposing necessity of turning it to its proper account,—of using the leisure and security which we are enjoying to the cultivation of the faculties with which God has blessed us,—to bring them, in a time so favourable, to that degree of ripeness, that we may in every case distinguish the occasions presented by our Master of serving him to the honour and glory of his name. There are also not a few errors, peculiar to this our state, against which we have to guard, and one or two of these I shall now proceed to describe. •

When alarmed at the un contemplated result of any action, men are apt to flee for consolation to the consciousness of having done it with the best and purest intentions. Now this would be a reasonable resource for one, who, as in the times of ancient persecution, lived from day to day with his life on the edge of the sword, who, in jeopardy every hour, had little time to balance consequences, and therefore trusted in God for supplying his deficiency of foresight, provided the feeling upon which he acted were right. But it will furnish no excuse for us at this our period. The Great Searcher of all hearts has for us another interrogation to put.—“Has due advantage been

taken of the leisure and security afforded in my Church to form that conscience aright? The volume containing my will has never been violently plucked out of your hands, so comparatively regular is the train of events, that scarcely one might not have been provided against by a mind zealous of obedience: your meditations have been unbroken from without. What excuse, then, can you plead for being taken by surprise at any moment, and being obliged to act blindfold upon the crude and hasty dictates of an uninformed conscience?" Let us anticipate in our own hearts this solemn interrogation, and judge ourselves, that we be not judged of the Lord. If mere conscience (not considering whether it be informed or not, according to the means afforded) be sufficient to sanctify any act, how soon would the will of our Master become a dead letter, since he that knows much and he that knows little may then do equally good service. How unnecessarily urgent would seem the Apostle's injunction "to be vigilant, to be sober, to be understanding what the will of the Lord is." Why need we think of the advice "to examine our ourselves, prove our ourselves, know our ourselves?" Why should we take heed to the warning of the Prophet, who tells

us "that the heart is deceitful above all things?" Why to the command "to make the best of the talents committed to our charge," of which the knowledge of God's will is the most precious, for he has not made us mere creatures of impulse? Assuredly the heart which has not been strictly trained up, and informed by diligent comparison with God's holy word and commandments, which has not had its motives continually and jealously questioned, nor been checked here,—spurred there,—disciplined every where,—will, when suddenly called forth, carry into action some interested motive, some unworthy affection which the emergency of the moment allows it not leisure to sift and expel. When too late these make their appearance, overwhelm with shame and confusion, and discourage in future from the very best and safest undertakings.

If in this period we are called upon for a higher exertion of our faculties, we have also to guard more against that abuse of them, which, like the weed to the plant, is so apt to spring up with it, and choke or destroy its growth. One of these, beyond all others, requires a constant curb from the sober and vigilant Christian, and the more so perhaps in proportion to the cultivation of his

mind, and that is, the imagination. Beyond number, indeed, and beyond weight, are the evils to which its abuse may give birth. One only, however, concerns the subject now in hand.

In those early days of the church, to which so much reference has been made, the real and deeply contrasted events with which they were engaged,—the numerous perils with which they were beset around,—the frequent calls to come forward and do or suffer, utterly prevented them from attending to its delusions. But in a period of leisure and security, like ours, it is drawn upon to supply, as it may, that excitement, and administer to that novelty which is so natural to man. This it is which above all blinds the mind's sight to the occasions presented by the hand of God. They are not sufficiently striking forsooth, they are associated with common-place and the detail of ordinary life; they are tricked out in none of those brilliant colours with which it has invested the day of proof and trial. They are, therefore, carelessly passed by. Another comes, and still another, but neither is it yet the time. He reserves himself for a day of his own choosing, and not of God's offering; he looks forward in his carnal mind to some theatrical exhibition of his

faith, and the future confessor, amid his lofty speculation is overthrown, and brought to the ground by the slightest and the most despised of daily incidents. For the value of any excitement of mind, where this power is concerned; for the reality of his zeal, his love, his faith, and all on which he builds, I would refer him to no unsubstantial vision, but an actual scene which shortly preceded the death of our blessed Lord. Of all that immense crowd which with waving boughs of palm, and loud hosannas, were conducting him through the streets of Jerusalem, over their strewn garments, in triumph to his temple,—how many but a few days after interfered to save him from the cross,—how many did not surround that cross with mockings and revilings?

Shall the opportunity, then, set before his eyes, serve at best but as a keynote to a strain of idle dreaming and unprofitable speculation? Yet, to use the words of the Lawgiver, it is not hidden from him, neither is it afar off; it is not in heaven, nor beyond the sea, but it is nigh unto him, that he may do it. O! never let the healthy activity of practice yield to a morbid habit of speculation. Hurtful as the effects of such an exchange will be, they will not stop at mere neglect of oppor-

tunities, but go on to undermine the foundations of religious faith, which can continue pure in doctrine, and vital in practice, only by resolutely casting off all self-conceived notions; by bringing the imagination in strict subjection to the sober tenor of Scripture; by giving up the heart in all simplicity, and the mind in concentrated attention upon its facts and doctrines, and by seeking diligently every occasion to put the grace of God into practical effect.

When our blessed Saviour was anointed by Mary with a most costly unguent, a murmur was vented against her by the man who was on the point of betraying him, because she had not rather sold it, and distributed the money to the poor. Our Lord approved of Mary's act, he accepted it as the last pious office of a nearest and dearest friend, who had thus anointed his body for burial. By this approval he has given us, indeed, a strong admonition how we should employ every occasion of shewing towards him our entire devotion and love. For that occasion is offered by himself, in that he is peculiarly present. We are not to turn away, as his betrayer, and the tempter of that betrayer would persuade us, and shut up our heart, substituting for the

lively reality, a crowd of beings, of neither time nor place, who can neither feel nor be felt for; thus entering into a ruinous barter, by which we may think to make compensation for our neglect of God's work, by the greater good which we imagine ourselves to be pursuing, and proceeding in regular course from sins of omission, to those of commission. What indeed were this, but a mental idolatry,—what, but to turn from the face of the living God, and address ourselves to the work of our own hands: rather let us pour upon him, now that he is with us, the whole treasure of our exertions, and fill the house of his presence with its perfume. Whatever the future may be, however brilliant, however important, let us remember that, by God's ordinance, the present is the only door to it; and if, in our hasty presumption, we leap over the wall, we alight without the fold of God, and not within it.

In that fold, in his holy and blessed church, we have been gathered by Christ, having been bought with a price, even with his own precious blood, and are his servants to do his will, and not to seek our own. We are to keep a vigilant look out for the opportunities peculiar to the several stations which he has assigned us, and these, if

attended to, are sufficient to crowd our sphere of duty to fulness. In arrogating a wider range, we are assuming a power which he has not accorded us, and with a barren ambition, overlooking what he has put legitimately into our grasp. There, in that calling in which he hath called us, is his presence chamber; there is his holy place, in which only, he will accept our offerings; there is the Zion of the living God, where, if we be not found, we are bowing before the calves at Bethel. If our own experience haply has not taught us, let us learn from the warning voice of others, that if there be one circumstance which more than another imbitters a retrospect, it is the view of unemployed opportunities. They have glided by perhaps with slight impression, and carelessly noticed, but, like those bowmen of old, are terrible when past, dealing behind them wounds of remorse and shame. Then their despoiler in amazement beholds the number which he has permitted to pass by, and sees them blocking up against him that point, to which they were tending, and might have conducted him. And that is some blessing from which he now finds himself for ever excluded; some honourable sphere, perhaps, of usefulness, never now to be

gained; some service in his heavenly Master's house on earth, replete with heart-filling and exalted duties, which is now unattainable; and finding that future upon which he has been drawing, like a thoughtless spendthrift, entirely empty of its treasures, sits down bankrupt in hope, and bemoaning his folly in vain.

Can he complain that these opportunities come to him not sufficiently distinct for his apprehension?—this is but to admit that he was deficient in vigilance. His heavenly Master gave him ample notice of their passage,—for all were accompanied with some change of body or mind, or the things without,—with gain or with loss,—with joy or with sorrow,—with warning or with invitation, which might have awakened all but the determinedly reckless. And by their proper disposal, he might have obtained the gift of still greater, and seen in their Giver, an unfailing author of good, to whom he could look up with confidence in the hour of need,—an object of faithful, though imperfect services, whom he could regard with the sure and certain hope of his reward,—an indulgent and long-suffering Lord, who would be often content to take the will for the deed. But now, alas, the contrast! He sees in

that Giver, a kind master neglected and disobeyed,—a friend who had even given his life for him empty-handed, and unrequited,—a witness whose testimony shall reach his most secret and perverse ways,—and a Judge, with whom there shall be no favour.

“The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away.”
O! as he hath given us the light through his Holy Spirit, may he continue it unto us, nor may we by recklessness of life, give him cause to take it away. May we thus be enabled with all discernment to redeem the time, with grace to order all our works to his honour and glory, and offer to him in our souls and our bodies, a continual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

SERMON V.

ON THE FORMER AND THE LATTER DAYS.

ROM. xv. 10.

Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.

THE day, whence the Church is now dating its holy seasons, the anniversary of the first Epiphany of our Lord, was that on which may be said to commence the gathering of the Jew and Gentile into one fold by his manifestation to the latter. It thus divided the world, past and to come, into two portions, distinct as darkness from light, and denominated by the Prophets the former and the latter days. In those they lived, and to these they looked forward with straining eyes and yearning hearts,

as the great Prophet and Lawgiver to the promised land (but not to be entered by him) from the heights of Pisgah, and in these we are dwelling: our forefathers, under the conduct of the second Joshua, having exchanged the palling food and scanty wells of the wilderness for the varied abundance of a land flowing with milk and honey, and the full unfailing stream of a spiritual Jordan. On such an occasion it should seem but reasonable to review the blessedness upon which we have entered, and enhance its enjoyment by a retrospect of the comfortless region whence we originally came.

At the time of this our Saviour's manifestation, the civilized portion of the globe may, with reference to their fitness for appreciating the blessing then revealing, be divided,—both Jew and Gentile, into two classes. One consisted of such as buried their hearts and understandings in the outward forms and ceremonies of religion, which had been handed down from their ancestors,—a continually accumulating mass, which in the end absorbed every moment necessary to the exertion of the spirit, and forbade it the least leisure which might enable it to penetrate their thick covering. So had even the

divine law of Moses been overlaid, and its spirit reduced to mere formal letter by the superstitions of the Pharisees. Another comprehended those who saw the inanity and pernicious effects of the burden to which the vulgar had so implicitly bowed the back. This last may again be considered under two divisions,—the first of such as being repelled by the absurdities of the vulgar, passed into the opposite extreme, and denied the most important truths, as the Sadducees among the Jews; the Epicureans among the heathen,—and the second of those, who, estimating at their due value those superstitions, were but the more induced by their contradiction to their own feelings to search out the truth, and endeavour to arrive at the pure model which had been thus hideously disguised by the superfluous dress, put on from time to time by successive generations. To this division, so lamentably insignificant, if appreciated by its numbers; so highly important, if by its intelligence, belonged the remnant of Israel which was to be saved, of which we have examples in Anna and Simeon, and the luminaries in the better philosophy of the heathen world. And to this, as comprehending all whose notions

can best supply us with means of estimating our own blessedness as living in the latter days, and put us in mind of what we have derived from the first manifestation of the Saviour of the world, it will be to my present purpose to refer.

So connected is the whole scheme of the Gospel, so intimately related in all its parts, that it will be sufficient to canvas their opinions upon one point only; which familiar though it be to us, as being the cardinal doctrine of our religion, almost indeed a summary of the rest, was to them the greatest mystery of all: I mean the remission of sins.

The pious and intelligent Jew, when he contemplated the law, pure as it came into the hands of Moses from the Angel of the Covenant, could not fail to be struck by its inadequacy. Not, indeed, that he could have discovered this of himself: but the very Revelation supplied him, by God's express purpose, with elements of thought, which legitimately pursued, carried him in advance beyond the point at which its injunctions stopped and ceremonies ceased. God subjected the creature in hope. But with his eyes thus opened he

found the liberty, to which he attained, on the assurance of remission of sins, every where circumscribed, and the Spirit tied down to the letter. Repentance, implied in the confession made previous to the sacrifice, was required of him, but he could not go, as fain he would, immediately before God with this spiritual offering, with the sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit. He was sternly reminded of a sinful body, held at a mortifying distance, a bar being opposed by a ceremony of the flesh. Nay, even this carnal sacrifice could not be offered by himself. He must offer it through the intervention of another,—the priest, whose holiness again, which gave him admission to the footstool of the Lord's throne, was not real, but imputed in virtue of his consecration. So forcibly was thrust upon the penitent, at every step, the sense of his utter intrinsic unholiness; and what, after all, was the sacrifice? The blood of animals, which his reason told him could in itself have no efficacy to the washing away of sin, and taught him to consider as a minister of the deepest humiliation, for he saw in it a rigorous extortion of confession of unworthiness, a severe

and visible reproof which there was no evading. He was put in mind of the heinousness of his offence, and warned of his own deserts by the death of the victim slaughtered before his eyes. He found himself in the situation of a culprit, upon whom, though assured by his judge of pardon, yet the sentence of death went forth in all its appalling terms,—in all its forms of degradation. So that, after all the process, spiritual and carnal, had been gone through, the mind still felt its impurity, was keenly sensible to the pain of its fall from innocence : there was none of that freedom and assurance of acceptance with which the Christian, being perfected as pertaining to the conscience by the blood of Christ, comes before God. He came with all the timid conscience of a pardoned slave, not with the frank and generous confidence of an accepted son. And deeply, indeed, must this child of Israel have felt his humiliated condition, when not himself only, but all the sons of Abraham, the whole gathered nation of vaunted privileges, were annually, on the great day of atonement, summoned before the bar of God, and underwent, in the very

ceremony of absolution, all the forms of condemnation and death.

If we add to this general feeling of bondage, which the very assurance of forgiveness, compared with the means through which it was conveyed, would suggest, the fact, that these burdensome rites were declared by God himself, through the mouth of his prophets, to be indeed unnecessary in themselves, at the same time that he insisted so strictly upon their imposition, and so far from containing essentially any thing spiritual must yield to moral excellence,—that to obey was said by him to be better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams,—that God desired mercy and not sacrifice, and that the knowledge of God was more than burnt offerings; must he not in this article of remission of sins have still more deeply felt his bondage,—lamented his straitened spirit,—and deemed the yoke all but intolerable? When, in proceeding further, we find that it was intimated to him in terms sufficiently plain in the inspired writings, that the priesthood was to be changed,—the old covenant abolished,—that an immediate communication, and no longer through the cold repelling form of types, was to be opened with God, all by a

second special intervention of his with mankind through his Christ, — that the very time was fixed,—how must he have sighed to escape from the house of bondage,—how restless must have been the abode of his prison-house, with the glad sounds of a glorious world without reaching his ears, and a ray, in tantalizing token, struggling through the loopholes of his dungeon. O! faintly, indeed, most faintly (and blessed be God for it) can we enter into the feelings of those holy bosoms which were expecting redemption in Israel, at our Lord's first Epiphany, and but slightly experience the force of those expressions of the holy Simeon, when, on his presentation, he held up before the Lord, the Saviour of the world, and cried, "Lord! now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."—

Turning from the perplexity of the Jew upon this doctrine, let us now advert to the heathen. We shall find that here it was an utter mystery, the unravelling of which was quite beyond his powers, to whatever degree exerted.

The forgiveness of sins has been very commonly ascribed to repentance. This is one of those numerous instances in which constant concommi-